



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Smarter Balanced Approves Initial ALDs
and Sustainability Plan**

*Announces affiliation with UCLA's National Center for Research on
Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)*

OLYMPIA, Wash.— The Governing States of the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](http://SmarterBalanced.org) (Smarter Balanced) voted today to move forward with a key policy decision to ensure the assessments reflect the depth and rigor of the Common Core State Standards. In addition, the Consortium approved a motion to establish an affiliation with the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at the University of California, Los Angeles to begin after the conclusion of the federal grant in 2014.

At a conference in Arlington, Va., state education chiefs met in a public session and approved initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs)—which distinguish among the levels of student performance in English language arts/literacy and mathematics on the Smarter Balanced assessments. Governing States agreed to continue discussions within their states of a college content-readiness policy, which describes how scores on the high school assessment can be used by colleges and universities. Smarter Balanced is committed to achieving consensus between K-12 and higher education on the policy implications of how the assessments will be used to help students move to postsecondary success.

Governing States also voted to accept the recommendations of a Sustainability Task Force, including: a scope of services and a plan to engage with CRESST at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies as an ongoing affiliate. Governing States also approved several amendments to the Consortium governance document.

"The actions taken by Governing States demonstrate that Smarter Balanced is on track for the implementation of next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core in the 2014-15 school year," said Joseph Martineau, Ph.D., Smarter Balanced Executive Committee Co-Chair and executive director of the Bureau of Assessment & Accountability at the Michigan Department of Education. "At the same time, affiliation with CRESST—recognized as one of the premier educational assessment and research centers in the nation—maintains and strengthens the work of our state-led consortium well into the future."

Adoption of the initial ALDs is part of an extensive collaboration between K-12 education agencies and institutions of higher education. The development of the initial ALDs began in October 2012 with collaboration among K-12 teachers and administrators and higher education faculty from two- and four-year colleges and universities representing Smarter Balanced Governing States. A six-month review process engaged a broad array of K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, content experts, and education partners through two rounds of public comment in November and February.

The approved initial ALDs are based upon four levels of achievement that describe the level of rigor students have demonstrated: "thorough understanding," "adequate understanding," "partial understanding," or "minimal understanding" of knowledge, skills, and processes for the two assessed Common Core content areas



of English language arts/literacy and mathematics. Smarter Balanced is developing an integrated suite of ALDs that serve different purposes for item writing, standard-setting, and reporting results. Reporting ALDs—which will provide guidance to students and parents about how to interpret performance on the assessments—will be developed following standard setting in 2014. The complete English language arts/literacy and mathematics initial ALDs are available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/achievement-level-descriptors-and-college-readiness/>.

Governing States also voted to endorse recommendations from a Sustainability Task Force composed of K-12 and higher education representatives. Charged with developing recommendations about how states will procure, administer, and maintain the assessment system after the federal Race to the Top Assessment Program grant ends in September 2014, the task force determined that Smarter Balanced should affiliate with a major public research university. This affiliation with CRESST will offer flexibility for state procurement of Smarter Balanced services, provide access to faculty expertise and research support, and offer a full array of administrative services that the Consortium requires.

"We are excited to enter into a long-term affiliation with Smarter Balanced and contribute to the Consortium's efforts to ensure that large-scale assessments support teaching and learning," said Li Cai, Ph.D., co-director of CRESST and associate professor at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. CRESST conducts research into accountability systems, practices, and policies. The Center also evaluates a broad number of educational programs and methods, with a central goal of improved achievement for all students and reductions in achievement gaps.

"CRESST is a leader in developing assessment models that authentically measure the knowledge and skills students need for success after high school," added Eva Baker, Ph.D., co-director of CRESST and distinguished professor at the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. "Affiliating with Smarter Balanced is part of our commitment to helping states implement college- and career-ready standards and assessments."

The third Smarter Balanced Collaboration Conference brought together representatives from the Consortium's 25 members—including state education chiefs, K-12 state leads, higher education leads, work group members, and contractors—to facilitate coordination on the design and implementation of the next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. In accordance with the Consortium's state-led governance structure, the 21 Smarter Balanced Governing States each have a vote on major policy decisions through their chief state school officer or delegate. The next Smarter Balanced Collaboration Conference will be held in September 2013.

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About Smarter Balanced

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium brings together states to create a common, innovative assessment system for mathematics and English language arts/literacy that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and helps prepare students for college and careers. The Consortium involves educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups in a transparent and consensus-driven process to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. The Consortium's projects are funded through a four-year, \$175 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, comprising 99 percent of activity resources,



with the remaining support provided through generous contributions of charitable foundations. Membership is open to any interested U.S. state. For more information, please visit www.smarterbalanced.org.